

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

21 August 1983

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 7-G

Lest we forget the dirty secret of the Barbie case

By Edwin Guthman
Editor of *The Inquirer*

Once Klaus Barbie, the man known as the "Butcher of Lyon," was in French hands, the world was bound to learn that the U. S. Army had employed him as a counterespionage agent and then protected him from prosecution on charges that he was responsible for the wartime deaths of 100,000 French Jews and 20,000 French resistance fighters.

So, last March, after Bolivia expelled Barbie and that prompted news reports that he had worked for the Army's Counterintelligence Corps (CIC) in post-World War II Germany, the only honorable alternative open to the Reagan administration was to bring the skeleton out of the closet.

Quite sensibly Attorney General William French Smith assigned a trusted assistant, Allan A. Ryan Jr., to investigate. Then the administration did the right thing last week by making public Ryan's findings — a 218-page report and all supporting documents — and by sending a formal apology to France.

Thus, the administration salvaged what it could from a sordid episode in American history. It muted criticism from abroad by putting out the details and not letting them emerge from somewhere else and it did so honestly.

But, that's what is called cutting your losses. The dirty secret that U.S. Army officers had smuggled Barbie out of Europe to Bolivia in 1951 rather than turn him over to the French had rattled around U.S. intelligence agencies all these years.

As the Ryan report unfolds, it is clear that awareness of Barbie's collaboration with

the Army and vice versa passed through many hands in the intelligence agencies and on occasion in the State Department. Meanwhile he was living prosperously and free in La Paz, the Bolivian capital, as "Klaus Altmann," the name he had been given by the CIC on the forged visa and false identity papers that enabled him to get safely out of Europe.

And meanwhile, the statute of limitations was running on the French charges that Barbie murdered and tortured French resistance fighters and Jews while chief of the Gestapo in Lyon from 1942 to 1944. (It expired and Barbie is now awaiting trial on charges of committing "crimes against humanity.")

In 1972 Beate Klafeld, a French Jew who with her husband had devoted their lives to tracking down Nazi war criminals, announced at a news conference in La Paz that "Altmann" was Barbie. And in the ensuing years as the French sought to extradite Barbie, the only indication in the Ryan report of U.S. involvement, is a notation that the State Department notified Bolivia that "it was inclined to the view" that the United States had "no interest in pro-

tecting" Altmann.

One is left to wonder whether the Bolivians all along knew that "Altmann" was Barbie, that he had worked for the U.S. Army and whether that was any factor in Bolivia's refusal to hand him over to the French until this year.

There is nothing in Ryan's report which indicates that the enormity of Barbie's alleged crimes weighed in the slightest on the high-ranking CIC officers who lied to their superiors and smuggled him out of Europe or on those U.S. intelligence and State Department officers who came to know about the shameful connection in later years.

Barbie had been a high-ranking Gestapo official. After the war the CIC recruited him to operate a counterintelligence network of former Gestapo and SS agents. He was, in the words of an Army memo cited in Ryan's report, "considered to be one of the most valuable assets targeted against Soviet intelligence operations and the subversive communist elements in Southern Germany."

The officers who arranged his escape had to have seen photographs of the emaciated survivors who were found in the Nazi con-

centration camps. They had to have been aware of testimony and judgment at the Nuremberg war crime trials. They had to be aware of reports that Barbie tortured and murdered French resistance fighters. Yet, they remained impervious.

And, even more troubling is Ryan's disclosure that from 1964 to 1967 the Army seriously sought to "reactivate" Barbie to serve as an informant in an intelligence operation in South America.

As chance would have it, a letter by Mrs. Sandra S. Zanic of Rockville Center, N.Y., may have done more to block Barbie's reactivation than any qualms in the U.S. intelligence establishment about his shameful past.

CONTINUED